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ABSTRACT

School administrators in the 1980's must learn to provide stronger instructional leadership to improve student achievement and restore public confidence in education. School improvement will occur, however, only as a result of changes in attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors. Only when teachers have worked out their own concerns regarding a given improvement strategy will they be able to effectively implement that strategy in the classroom. The school improvement planning process requires identifying the general problem, delineating goals and objectives, generating and evaluating alternative solutions, preparing activities to achieve the desired school improvement, designating staff to carry out the plan, and monitoring the plan's effectiveness. Amid the current climate for public education, school improvement activities will have to focus on the devlopment of an "older teaching staff" that may not include the most effective professionals. For the immediate future, staff development activities are likely to center on the need for more effective schooling, increased student achievement, more effective discipline, and more stringent demands on pupils to learn. To become more diagnostic, prescriptive, and reflective in their instructional planning, teachers need formal instruction under simulated conditions provided through the cooperation of school boards, state departments of education, state education agencies, and institutions of higher education. (JBM)

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THE ROLE OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT IN LONG RANGE PLANNING FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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School Improvement in General

In the early 1980's school improvement efforts generally refer to a multitude of initiatives designed to make the public schools more effective and more cost conscious than they have been in the past. In the decade of the 80's, public educational administrators must face an entirely new set of issues. When compared with the expanding decade of the 60's and the 70's, the 80's will be very different. Instead of managing growth, as in the 60's administrators find themselves managing decline. Instead of having access to expanding funding sources for new program development, they will find diminishing financial resources. Instead of enjoying a buoyant public opinion toward education, they find a lack of confidence in the public schools. If school administrators are to lead school improvement efforts effectively a change will be required in the administrator's perceptions of his/her role. Administrators must provide strong instructional leadership to meet the challenges of the 80's. The profession itself must engage in a series of activities that will increase the educational leadership capabilities. Effective instructional leadership will lead to more learning for students. Improved student achievement will begin to restore the public's confidence in education.

School Improvement--A Process

Generally speaking, school improvement is a:

1. people process;
2. change process; and,
3. developmental process.

Change and improvement in the schools, will not be achieved by stating goals on paper. Improvement will occur when behavioral change activities are

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provided to teachers, administrators and others who are directly engaged in the instructional process. School improvement will require changes in attitudes, perceptions and behaviors of professionals and paraprofessionals if it is to be successful.

School improvement is fundamentally a change process; any effort to improve the quality of schooling must engage all parties in a planned change activity. In that regard, it is important to note among other things, that the persons involved directly in a "change experience" must experience a developmental process of concerns resolution; the use of new behaviors, instructional techniques also go through a developmental process.

One view of the change process (CBAM--Concerns Based Adoption Model)[1] posits that the person using or adopting a new instructional technique or program must progress through several stages of self-concerns dealing with self, task and impact. First, each person must resolve his/her concerns regarding the improvement strategy and the personal demands that the improvement program will make upon him or her. At this stage, the person may be anxious about the demands, the new skills to be learned, the new knowledge that may be required. A considerable amount of anxiety and/or hostility may arise as the individual faces the inevitability of changing his/her behavior. Unless and until these concerns are resolved, the person will not become fully engaged in the process of adopting the new improvement effort. Usually, some type of personal consultation or group discussion will help persons to realize that they are not alone in regard to their feelings about what needs to be done for them or with them.

Once a person's self-concerns are resolved, then the person may begin to attend to the task of the school improvement effort. At that time, the concerns generally develop related to the person's direct role in using the improvement

[1] Hall, G.E., Wallace, R.C., Dossett, W.F., The Concerns Based Adoption Model: A Developmental Conceptualization of the Educational Change Process. Austin, Texas, The Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, The University of Texas at Austin, 1972.

strategy. Through a series of workshops or other planned experiences, the person can generally acquire the skills, understandings, and the attitudes that are necessary to fully implement the improvement strategy.

When the concerns about the task of using the improvement strategy have been resolved, then, and only then, will the person be able to look at the impact of the use of the improvement strategy on pupils. It seems strange that the concerns about the learners are the last to develop. However, unless and until the concerns about the self and the concerns about the self in relation to the task have been resolved, the person can not see beyond those stages to begin to gauge the impact that is intended for pupils in terms of more efficient and effective learning.

While this developmental process of self to task to impact concerns resolution unfolds, the strategy or activity designed to improve schooling is undergoing a developmental sequence with respect to its use. That is, a new instructional skill or instructional material will be used imperfectly at first before becoming routinized and ultimately accommodated into the behavioral repetoire of the professional or paraprofessional. As this process evolves from ineffective use to routine use over a period of time, it corresponds to a reduction of self and task stages of concern. In the final analysis, it is important to understand that any school improvement process is a developmental process in which the individuals themselves will go through a sequence of concerns reduction while using an instructional technique or a product with more effectiveness over a period of time. The length of time required to achieve effective implementation will vary according to the stages of concerns and the levels of use of the innovation.

In summary, it has been asserted that the school improvement process is both a people oriented process and a change process that is developmental in

nature. It may be wise to point out at this time what school improvement is not. School improvement is not a paper process or product. School improvement will not result from a compilation of planned courses of study or other materials, per se. School improvement will not happen because of a statement of goal is announced by an administrator or by a Board of Education. School Improvement can not and will not take place unless there are specific behavioral changes in people; and it will not be achieved unless it is a thoroughly planned program with very careful attention to the developmental characteristics of the change processes involved.

Planning for School Improvement

The planning process must start with a very specific identification of the problem to be addressed. The problem identification can result from a needs assessment in which various parties rank order the district's needs as they perceive them. This assessment process should involve general public, parents, and a sample of educational professional and support personnel. Whatever methods are used to identify and specify the problem, this must be the starting point. Technical assistance will probably be required to develop the information gathering data reduction activities.

Once the general problem has been identified, then a number of groups need to be involved in initial planning to analyze and define the problem carefully. Teachers, administrators, board, and general public should be engaged in this activity.

Following a delineation of goals and objectives, the planning group should then begin to generate alternative solutions to the problem as it relates to the goals and objectives that have been identified. The alternatives should then be tested in terms of their feasibility and cost benefit analysis; the parties must finally agree upon a specific set of activities to be implemented in order to

achieve the school improvement desired. Persons must then be assigned the responsibility to develop specific time related plans that will result in the implementation of activities and events designed to bring about the school improvement. Finally, staff must be designated to carry out the improvement program.

It is important at the outset, to develop plans to evaluate the effectiveness of the school improvement program. They should be formulated after the goals, objectives and the strategies have been clearly delineated. Part of the evaluation program must involve monitoring of the implementation process in order to take corrective action, as required to facilitate the effective achievement of program goals. Obviously, an important part of the evaluation is to make final judgments about the effectiveness of the total school improvement program.

The preceding has attempted to identify school improvement as a people oriented change process that requires careful delineation of the problem, generation and implementation of plans that are internally consistent with the goals and objectives; the monitoring evaluation of the program's implementation must receive top priority in order to assess the quality of the overall school improvement effort.

Staff Development--General

Public opinion polls and issues such as tuition tax credits clearly communicate a crisis of confidence in public education. Parents and the general public are demanding that the public schools produce more results in terms of student learning and school discipline. Additionally, public unrest also takes the form of taxpayer revolts such as Proposition 13 in California and Proposition 2½ in Massachusetts. Taxpayers are clearly in a mood to reduce the cost of education. This comes at a time when enrollment in public schools is declining

significantly due to a significant drop in the birth rate. Because of school closings and the accompanying reduction of force of personnel, a "graying of the educator profession" is occurring. Many young teacher aspirants have been counseled out of teacher training because of the decline in job prospects. Additionally, many young professionals with ten to fifteen years of experience are being furloughed because of school closings. The net effect of these factors is that our school improvement efforts will focus on staff development activities with an "older teaching staff" that may not include the most effective professionals.

Staff Development--Specific

For the immediate future, school improvement efforts are likely to center on staff development activities including the following targets:

1. Effective Schooling;
2. Increased Student Achievement;
3. More Effective Discipline; and,
4. More Stringent Demands on Pupils to Learn.

The schools, like many other institutions in our society, have tended to become lax regarding demands for student achievement. The decade of the 60's and the 70's that witnessed a broad expansion of programs in the schools also witnessed a decline in the standards expected of students. Additionally, schools also reflected the general disruption and lack of respect for authority that permeated our society. Thus, the most simple and direct challenge facing public schools is to exert stronger student control and tighten up the academic standards for students.

How do we bring about school improvement? School improvement must focus on instructional improvement. Therefore, superintendents and principals must become instructional leaders as well as managers. Most superintendents and principals were prepared at a time when instructional leadership was not central to their studies; therefore, training opprotunities need to be provided to assist them

to acquire the orientation and the skills to function as instructional leaders. Similarly, if teachers are to become more effective they will have to be trained to become more diagnostic, prescriptive, and reflective in planning for instruction than has been expected, this is particularly true at the secondary level. Teachers at all levels however should acquire a higher degree of sophistication in these matters. To bring about the changes that are necessary in school improvement, school districts and state departments of education must provide the time and the personnel to do the job.

Characteristics of Staff Development Training

Staff development training for school improvement should be research and/or theory based. Significant research findings emerged in recent years regarding effective staff development. For example, one of the chief findings regarding improved professional performance is the requirement to provide demonstration and modeling techniques for the adult learner. Adult learners must be provided with opportunity for appropriate practice under simulated conditions. Following the modeling and opportunity to practice, explicit feedback must be provided to the learners in order that they may modify or expand the behavior that they have observed and practiced. In the final analysis, staff development training based on demonstration, modeling, practice and feedback must take the most important step--coaching for application. Appropriate coaching and monitoring to insure that the learners have fully understood and are applying what they have learned in the classroom is necessary for effective school improvement.

One thing we have learned about staff development is that information alone will not change behavior. To bring about behavior change requires formal instruction, attention to the resolution of personal concerns and recognition of the developmental nature of the school improvement process.

School Districts must find ways to finance school improvement at the lowest

possible cost. One research finding indicates that local professionals often are the best providers of training for school improvement. Boards of Education must accept the responsibility to financially support the improvement process. The technical support can be provided through colleges, universities and the Department of Education. These institutions can provide assistance in the planning process and in the implementation of the improvement strategy. In all probability evaluation must be solely the responsibility of the state education agency or higher education. Most school district personnel simply do not have the expertise in evaluation required to achieve effective monitoring and assessment of the results of school improvement.